

the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge or affect their civil capacities."

The advocacy of this measure brought on the bitterest contest in which Jefferson was ever engaged. It was the beginning of his long warfare with the clergy. In terms peculiar to theological combat he was denounced as the enemy of religion and as an atheist. The clergy at first were successful. The bill failed to pass. Some of its provisions, however, were acceded to by the legislature. The law declaring unorthodox opinion to be criminal was repealed, attendance at church was made voluntary and dissenters were allowed to withhold their contributions from the Episcopal Church. These were substantial gains, but they were far from religious liberty as aimed at by Jefferson. For three years he fought for the complete separation of Church and State, and then, being called to a higher station, he left his plans in the hands of his able and indispensable coadjutors, George Wythe, and his young disciple, James Madison. In 1786, after a struggle of ten years, Jefferson had the supreme satisfaction of seeing his bill pass without material change.

He did not over-estimate the importance of his efforts in behalf of religious liberty.\* If the Republic of the United States is new in any important sense, if it has introduced anything really novel among human institutions, that new thing is the separation of Church and State. The world has had its democracies, its republics, its governments with a trinal division of powers, its representative systems, but it has never before known such a thing as a free state existing side by side with a free church, and along with this an almost perfect freedom of religious opinion. This is what Virginia needed and what the United States needed, and Jefferson saw the need more clearly than any man of his time.

The man who wrote the words "all men are created equal" could not but be expected to chafe under the institutions of slavery. Jefferson was an abolitionist in theory, but practical abolition presented insuperable objections to his mind. His

\*See Religion, page 357.